

COCAINE SMUGGLING

Police form team to quiz the arrestees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A 10-member police team has been formed to interrogate those arrested for their alleged links with the cocaine consignment seized in Chittagong port on June 6.

Kusum Dewan, deputy commissioner of Detective Branch (DB) of the Chittagong Metropolitan Police, would supervise the team, lead by SM Tanvir Arafat, additional deputy commissioner of CMP DB, said sources.

On Friday, CMP Commissioner Abdul Jalil Mondol formed the team comprising five assistant commissioners, two officers-in-charge of two police stations and two DB inspectors.

The team yesterday held a meeting with Kusum Dewan and CMP Additional Commissioner Debidas Bhattacharjee.

Four persons -- Atiqur Rahman, Mostafa Kamal, AK Azad and Golam Mostafa Sohel -- have been detained in connection with the seizure of a barrel of cocaine.

The liquid cocaine was hidden in the barrel that arrived at Chittagong port on May 8 along with 106 more barrels in a container from Bolivia via Uruguay. The other barrels contained sunflower oil.

According to the cargo manifest recorded at the National Board of Revenue, a Bolivian company -- Import Export Vaiven SRL -- shipped the consignment from Montevideo Port in Uruguay.

Mamata

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ongoing for the last three months," she told an administrative meeting in Berhampur of Mushidabad district on Wednesday.

The chief minister would write a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi informing him about her strong stance on Farakka. The draft of the letter has already been prepared, said sources at the West Bengal state secretariat.

Mamata said a section of government officials in the Centre was behind giving more Ganges water to Bangladesh. She claimed that she became sure of the situation after seeing some CCTV footage of the barrage.

She was irked when some officials of the irrigation department in the district said they looked after the barrage, said meeting sources.

C Sudhakar, superintendent of police in Murshidabad, said the CCTVs were not working. The chief minister said there must be a subversion of the technology.

Contacted, General Manager of Farakka barrage Saumitra Kumar Haldar said there is no logic behind the allegation that Bangladesh is getting more water than its share of the Ganges water. Footage of CCTVs cannot give the measure of water flow at Farakka point, he added.

As per the Ganges Water Sharing Agreement, 1996, Bangladesh and India get a fixed supply of water from January 1 to May 31 each year. The water supply for the rest of the year depends on the storage capacity of the dam and the water flow level there.

Mamata made headlines on September 7 in 2011 by opting out of the delegation led by then Indian premier Manmohan Singh to Dhaka at the last minute due to her opposition to the Teesta water-sharing deal. As a result, the Teesta agreement could not be signed then.



A sack of "substandard" wheat imported from Brazil being unloaded from a truck at a government warehouse in Kushtia. Local lawmaker Abdur Rouf checks a sample of the wheat, top right. He later ordered the warehouse authorities not to store the wheat, bottom right, without having its quality tested first.



PHOTO: STAR

Test, then store

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of the grains and found it unfit for human consumption.

This measure was taken by a ruling party parliamentarian amid concern over whether the 2 lakh tonnes of imported wheat is suitable for human consumption.

On June 30, the High Court ordered the health secretary and the director general of the Directorate General of Food to report in three days whether the wheat was suitable for consumption.

The court order came after the

Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) found the Brazilian wheat substandard.

The BCSIR said all the supplied samples of the imported wheat contained higher amount of shrunk and broken kernels than specified.

The state-run agency conducted the test after the food ministry claimed that the grains were found fit for human consumption. The ministry had carried out the tests at its lab.

However, neither the food directorate nor the BCSIR conducted any

toxicity test to see whether the wheat was fit for human consumption.

Two contractors -- Netherlands-based Glencore Grain and Singapore-based Olam International -- supplied the grains to the food directorate earlier this year.

The wheat was used in the government's various safety net schemes, such as Test Relief (TR), Food for Work (FFW), Open Market Sales, and as rations for law enforcement agencies.

The police administration later complained about the low quality

grains.

Sahabul Alam, in-charge of the warehouse, told reporters that the cereal was intended to be distributed for TR and FFW programmes. He added that he had already informed the higher authority of the matter.

While visiting the spot around 3:00pm, this correspondent found that six wheat-laden trucks were parked outside the warehouse and eight inside its compound.

In the evening, the trucks that were kept outside were allowed entry inside the depot area but no grain

was unloaded from the trucks until 8:00pm.

Police personnel were deployed at the warehouse to ensure security.

Despite repeated attempts, District Food Controller Swapnan Kumar Kundu could not be reached over the phone for comments. Regional Controller of Food in Khulna Kazi Nurul Islam also did not receive phone calls.

Contacted, Kushtia Deputy Commissioner Syed Bealal Hossain told this correspondent that he was not informed of the matter.

BEACH ATTACK

State of emergency declared in Tunisia

BBC ONLINE

Tunisia has declared a state of emergency, just over a week after 38 tourists, mainly Britons, died in an attack in the resort city of Sousse.

The state of emergency gives security forces more powers and limits the right of public assembly.

Authorities had already tightened security, deploying more than 1,400 armed officers at hotels and beaches.

Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi said in a national address that "exceptional measures" were needed.

"In order to face up to this scourge we need to be prepared. We need to have enough troops, proper training and material means - we are in desperate need of material means," he said, appealing for international counter-terrorism support and co-operation.

The state of emergency will be in place for a renewable period of 30 days.

An official from the prime minister's office said several officials had been sacked in the wake of the attack, including the governor of Sousse.

"Just as there have been security

failures, there have also been political failures," Dhafer Neji told AFP.

Security forces were criticised for not responding more quickly to the attack on 26 June in Sousse, when a gunman opened fire on tourists on a beach and in a hotel before being shot dead by police.

Those killed included 30 Britons.

The gunman has been identified as student Seifeddine Rezgui, who authorities say had trained in Libya.

Tunisian Prime Minister Habib Essid conceded in a BBC interview on Friday that the slow response of the police was a key problem.

He said Rezgui had probably trained with the Ansar al-Sharia group, though Islamic State (IS) earlier said it was behind the attack.

Eight people have been arrested on suspicion of collaborating with Rezgui, and the government says it has uncovered the network behind the Sousse attack.

Authorities have also pledged to close some 80 mosques that were operating outside government control and accused of spreading extremism.

Syria rebels battle regime in Aleppo operation

AFP, Beirut

Two coalitions of Syrian rebels battled to advance in government-held western Aleppo Saturday, seizing an army barracks in one district, but being pushed back elsewhere.

The fighting in the country's former economic powerhouse is some of the fiercest since the Syrian conflict arrived in the northern city in mid-2012.

Elsewhere, government forces launched a major operation to recapture Zabadani, the last opposition-held town in the Qalamun region near Damascus.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported heavy clashes in several parts of Aleppo's west side.

It said fighters from the Conquest of Aleppo alliance of mostly moderate forces had captured Friday a former research centre being used as a military barracks.

"This is a significant strategic step in terms of the battle that has been going on in Aleppo in the past two years," Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman said, adding that it opened up lines of attack against several nearby regime-held districts.

Up mostly on greed

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Physicians sometimes don't want to wait for several hours to perform a normal delivery, and they opt for surgery, he said.

A private hospital in the capital charges a patient around Tk 10,000 on average for a normal delivery and up to Tk 50,000 for a c-section.

An icddr,b study on hospitals in 24 districts shows private hospitals performed more than double the c-sections done in public hospitals in 2012.

The 2012 study found that private hospitals had used partograph, a graphical record of key data (maternal and foetal) during labour, only in three percent of total deliveries.

"This low use of partograph proves that physicians don't adequately assess the patients before performing a c-section," said Dr Lumbini Roy, researcher at the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b).

Ishtiaq Mannan of Mamoni Project of Save the Children said around 80 percent of c-section is performed at private clinics and hospitals. This rate is very high by any standard.

Absence of a quality assurance system in healthcare centres and lack of accountability in clinical practice are partly responsible for this, he said.

Lumbini Roy said the Private Clinic Act mentions nothing about the procedure for reaching a decision on c-section delivery.

Dr Jamaluddin Chowdhury, secretary general of Bangladesh Private Medical Practitioners Association, stressed the need for enacting a law and enforcing it to keep the number of caesarean births to a minimum level.

IMPLICATIONS

Prof Talukder said a newborn baby, delivered through c-section, might miss exclusive breastfeeding which would hamper its brain development.

Caesarean patients, he pointed out, are also required to take a lot of medicine. If not taken properly, it might lead to antibiotic resistance in the patient's body.

As a surgical procedure, c-section carries a risk of damage to the mother's organs as well as blood loss and complications from anaesthesia.

Khadija Yasmin, a college teacher in Tangail, had c-section twice, but the stitching in the second surgery was not perfect. It was detected during a recent surgery for removing her uterus.

Her daughter Farhana Urmee said the latest surgery turned out to be very risky due to the earlier complications her mother had, and it took her two months to recover.

Saudi govt refused to intervene

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Dhaka were unavailable despite being asked for.

Mir Nasir, adviser to the BNP chairperson and former Bangladeshi ambassador to Saudi Arabia, expressed surprise when asked about it, "This is unbelievable." He claimed that Khaleda Zia had never asked for mediation. In answer to a question, he said, "I would have known if something like this had happened. This is impossible. Ziaur Rahman had special relations with the Saudi royal family and those relations are still intact today."

He reminisced about being present in a friendly meeting between Khaleda Zia and King Abdullah at the royal palace in Mecca in 2005. He questioned the authenticity of the Saudi cables published by WikiLeaks.

When contacted, an authoritative source from Jamaat said it would not be appropriate to comment without being informed.

But when asked about the matter, Bangladeshi ambassador to Saudi Arabia Golam Mosih told Prothom Alo that the King's decision reflects what they know of Saudi Arabia's policy.

He also confirmed that Saudi Arabia had not said anything to the government regarding the war crimes trial or internal politics. In his words, "The existing relations between Awami

League government and the Saudi government are cordial and they are growing every day. Recently during the Yemen crisis, we responded to their request when Pakistan could not. They are very pleased at this."

Mahbub Alam, another former diplomat who had worked in Saudi Arabia, said it only confirms the general policy followed by Saudi Arabia of not interfering in the internal affairs of non-Arab countries.

Referencing cables sent from the Saudi embassy in Dhaka in May-June 2012, the Saudi foreign ministry brought to King Abdullah's attention a letter of request from Khaleda Zia asking him to mediate in the political situation. Notably, the foreign ministry freshly reminded the king of a previous request by Jamaat to stop the war crimes trial in Bangladesh. The document also mentions that the Saudi King had already signed a royal decree saying that Saudi Arabia would not interfere in either case.

The then Saudi ambassador in Dhaka Dr Abdullah bin Nasser Al-Busairi had met Khaleda Zia on January 17, 2012 at her Gulshan office. Khaleda met the then defence minister and present King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz when she visited Saudi Arabia in August 2012 at the invitation of the royal family.

The Royal decree 61646 was cited in

a cable (Memo No. 7/2, Document No. 4/1 Dated 1433 month of Rajab) to the king by the foreign minister, written in the green pad of the Saudi Arabian foreign ministry in 2012. The decree stated that there would be no intervention in the internal matters of Bangladesh.

In the cable, Abdullah was told that the Saudi Embassy in Dhaka had received a letter from Khaleda Zia intended for him where he was congratulated for his seventh year of assuming power. In the letter, the king was also urged to mediate for a dialogue between the political parties to end the political crisis at the time.

The Saudi foreign minister also wrote in his cable that the Saudi embassy in Dhaka had informed him that an unstable situation exists in Bangladesh due to conflicts between the government and the opposition parties. Many opposition leaders and activists, a majority from Jamaat, have been imprisoned. It also mentioned that the Jamaat leaders had repeatedly asked for Saudi Arabia's interference for stopping their trial for war crimes in 1971. It further said Khaleda's letter came at a time when the opposition had shown great interest in Saudi Arabia's involvement in the mediation of the political situation in Bangladesh.

Dr Busairi was the Saudi envoy in

Dhaka for six and a half years from 2008 to 2014. The cables released by WikiLeaks were sent during his time.

A high ranking diplomat, who is an expert on the Saudi royal family and Dhaka-Riyadh relations, said about the report: "Saudi Arabia has never told the Awami League government anything in any way about the war crimes trial. The Bangladesh government itself has kept them informed about the matter throughout, though."

The diplomat also mentioned that Saudi Arabia's state-controlled daily Saudi Gadget has published post-editorials, expressing concerns about the issue. A man who had worked as a consul for the Saudi embassy in Dhaka had written regularly in it. But nothing was said about stopping the trials, rather it talked of maintaining international standards in the trials.

FROM ISLAMABAD

On the other hand, the Saudi embassy in Pakistan in a secret cable (No. 10/7/3 Dated 7/3/1433 Hijri, January 30, 2012) sent to the Asia office of its Foreign Ministry informed that the diplomat had learned from a special source that if the patriotic politicians of 1971 held in Bangladesh prison were put on trial, then Pakistan, especially its military, would consider it as an instigation against it. The source also said that recently 90-year-old professor Golam Azam was arrested on charges of collab-

orating with the Pakistani army in 1971 and for participation in secret killings during the 1971 war.

The cable also said that some retired military personnel thought that India was behind this instigation and that they were trying to entangle Pakistan in international justice.

The later part of this cable could not be found. But there is mention of a previous cable (No. 210/92/21/188 dated 18/3/1431, March 4, 2010) that indicates Saudi Arabia was interested in Pakistan's feelings regarding the war crimes trial. In a statement, Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan had asked for the interference of the Pakistan army to stop the trial in Bangladesh.

ARAFAT'S TREATMENT

The then Saudi foreign minister Saud Al Faisal, who is currently King Salman's foreign affairs adviser, told late King Abdullah's special secretary in March 2012 that the Saudi government had received a request for the treatment of Arafat Rahman, younger son of late president Ziaur Rahman and leader of the opposition Khaleda Zia, to be done at the King Faisal Specialised Hospital in Riyadh on Saudi expenses.

It mentioned that Arafat, convicted for financial corruption, was in Bangkok for treatment at the time. "We have determined that the treatment for his illness is available in Saudi Arabia

as well as Thailand," the cable further read, adding that given the situation, it would be better to disregard the request since it could cause tension between the Sheikh Hasina government and the Saudi government.

BNP leader and former diplomat Mir Nasir said that he had talked to former envoy Al Busairi about the treatment of Tarique Rahman in Saudi Arabia and Busairi had shown a positive attitude. But Nasir said he was not aware of the issue of Arafat's treatment. The cables, on the other hand, show that Al Busairi had expressed a negative opinion to his government about Khaleda's request for Arafat's treatment considering the present government's sensitive stance on this.

Asked about the Bangladesh-Saudi Arabia relations as disclosed in the WikiLeaks cables, M Humayun Kabir, former Bangladesh high commissioner to USA and vice-president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, told Prothom Alo: "The difference between the generally perceived notions and the reality regarding our relations with Saudi Arabia has been disclosed. There have been several changes in the leadership in Saudi Arabia in the last decade. So, it is normal that there will be reflection of a realistic, unsentimental, and mature foreign policy. It is rather time for us to be free of sentiments."